

Bronze shippers won't get any speed medals

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers:

Q—After seeing an item in your column six months ago, I ordered three bronze medals from the United States Mint. My check was cashed long ago, but I still haven't received the merchandise. Two letters to the mint offices in San Francisco have gone unanswered. Help!—T.P., Chicago Heights

A—Mint workers have a longstanding reputation for slow service, but a half year is laggard even for them. Go to the top with your complaint by writing mint director Donna Pope [United States Mint, Department of the Treasury, Washington, D.C. 20220]. In your letter, be sure to include your customer number, which should appear on your canceled check.

By the way, you are not the only suffering would-be buyer. I have received two other letters like yours in the last few weeks.

Q—My father gave us 200 Indian head cents he took out of circulation in the 1940s. We'd like to sell them and use the money for a trip abroad. What are they worth?—B.A., Elgin

A—Don't buy your airline tickets just yet. Most Indian heads, including all but three types made between 1887 and 1909, retail for \$1 or less if in the typical "good condition" category. You would be lucky to get 45 cents each for those common dates if you sell wholesale to a coin dealer.

I'll send you a list to use as you cull your hoard. But be forewarned: There's little chance of finding such keys as the 1877 [retail value \$250 in good condition] or the 1909-S [\$100].

Q—Where can I exchange \$3 in Canadian currency for United States money? My bills are not collectibles.—G.C., Chicago

A—Most major banks would make the switch at the going exchange rate less a service charge. You'd get a little more than \$2 in U.S. funds at current valuations.

Q—Some months ago I found a 1979 quarter with two perfectly struck head sides. I know that some individuals cut quarters in half and attach the two halves to form a fake two-headed coin, but I've examined my quarter closely and can find no evidence of such handiwork. Could the piece be an authentic error coin?—R.S., St. Joseph, Mich.

A—No. Government workers can't create a perfect two-headed or two-tailed coin with the equipment they use. Tricksters create the fakes either by slicing two coins, as you suggest, or by hollowing out one coin and fitting another to fit inside.